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ABSTRACT

A study examined three different basal reading series (MacMillan, Harcourt-Brace, and Scott Foresman) at four different levels for the types of stories found in the readers, as well as for acts of reading portrayed in the stories. Subjects, 12 second grade students at a New Jersey elementary school, completed a teacher-constructed inventory on the basal readers they were currently using. Data analysis showed that contemporary stories appeared most frequently, followed by folk tales, while fairy tales appeared least in the books examined. In all three basal series, contemporary stories became more prevalent as the grade level progressed. Total acts of reading portrayed in the stories constitute less than 10%, and usually showed people or animals reading signs. While the students seemed to enjoy reading in the basal series that they used, an apparent mismatch was found between the types of stories found in the readers and the types of stories the students preferred. (A section on related research and tables of data are appended.) (NKA)

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TYPES OF LITERATURE FOUND IN CHILDREN'S BASAL READERS

BY

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree

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ABSTRACT

This is a descriptive study that involved the examination of three different basal series at four different levels. The basal readers were examined for the type of stories found in the basal readers and acts of reading found in the basal readers. The basal series that were used are: MacMillan, Harcourt-Brace, and Scott Foresman. The stories in the basal readers were classified by type of story, grade level, acts of reading found in the story.

The subjects of this study involved nineteen second grade students at Sussex Avenue School. These students completed a teacher constructed inventory on the basal readers that they are now currently reading in. The results of the inventory showed a general mismatch between the type of stories found in the basal readers and what the children like to read.

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Numerous studies that have been done on the features of the basal readers and their relationship to reading. One factor that has been largely omitted has been the type of literature found in the basal readers. Green and Wilder (1986) state that, "It is widely believed that children's success in reading is greatly influenced by what is seen and done by companions and adults." This suggests that children learn reading habits by modeling.

Green and Wilder (1986) noted in a study of five basal series that event that involved the act of reading occured in 7-10% of the stories. The events that displayed reading showed people or animals reading signs. They also noted that reading was not displayed as a natural and daily part of life. This suggests that the importance of reading as a daily part of life is not being established enough in the basal readers.

Beverly Dryden (1986) states that children need to be encouraged to read at home as well as the classroom. This suggests that the environment of the child plays an important part in motivating the child to read. She goes on to state that we as educators must look beyond the basal readers to motivating the child to read. While the basal reader sets the course for reading, we cannot hold the basal readers responsible for a child's reading habits. However, we cannot ignore the importance of the content in the basal readers. If the stories in the basal readers are dull and boring, the child will show a disinterest in reading.

Kenneth Goodman (1986)criticizes the basals as being too skill oriented, that children never get a chance to actually read and that many of the stories are dull and boring. He further states that the stories in the basals should be of interest to the child. This suggests perhaps we as educators should take a good look at the content found in the basal and what we are teaching our children to do. Are basals too skill oriented? Is the content in the basal readers motivating the children to read?

If role-modeling is an important part of a child's reading habits, then reading should be shown as an integral part of daily life in both the basal stories and in the child's environment.

Data concerning the modeling behaviors about reading found in the basal reader should be of value to educators and parents since compensatory activities could be structured if calls for inclusion are established.

Hypothesis

It is hyothesized that after an examination of three different basal series at levels one through four, the literature found in the basal readers would show an infrequent act of reading, that only a limited range of types of literature would be found and that there would be a poor match between the types of stories children preferred to read and the kinds found in the basal readers.

Procedure

Three different basal series at four different levels were examined for the type of literature found in the basal readers. They

were also examined for any acts of reading. The series that were used were: MacMillan R Series, Scott Foresman Reading Series, and Harcourt Brace Reading Series. Each basal was classified by grade level, type of literature, and number of acts of reading by grade level.

Subjects

The subjects that were used were nineteen second grade students. These students were given a teacher constructed questionaire to determine a goodness of match between the type of story being read and the type the children would like to see more of.

Name_____ Grade_____

The book I am now reading in is_____.

My favorite story is_____.

I like that story because_____.

The stories I would like to see more of_____.

(type of story)

I like the book I am now reading in._____ Yes, No

Results

The basal readers as seen in table I were classified by the name of the company, type of literature and the number of each classifcation found at each level.

TYPES OF LITERATURE TABLE I

PUBLISHER	LEVEL	FOLK TALES	FAIRY TALES	CONTEMPORARY
MacMillan	1-1	5	2	12
	1-2	3	10	9

TYPES OF LITERATURE TABLE I (CONTINUED)

PUBLISHER	LEVEL	FOLK TALES	FAIRY TALES	CONTEMPORARY
MacMillan	2-1	4	6	10
	2-2	5	4	11
	3-1	2	3	10
	3-2	4	3	10
	4-1	9	2	10
	4-2	7	2	10
Scott-Foresman	1-1	10	3	7
	1-2	10	4	8
	2-1	7	3	10
	2-2	6	5	11
	3-1	5	3	12
	3-2	4	0	15
	4-1	3	0	15
	4-2	7	0	15
Harcourt-Brace	1-1	5	3	5
	1-2	6	3	5
	2-1	5	2	10
	2-2	4	4	11
	3-1	3	3	12

TABLE I (CONTINUED)

PUBLISHER	LEVEL	FOLK TALES	FAIRY TALES	CONTEMPORARY
Harcourt-				
Brace	3-2	4	0	12
	4	6	0	15

In analyzing the data, the following was found: contemporary stories appeared to be the most prevalent, folk tales followed as most frequent, while fairy tales appeared the least in the books that were examined. In all three basal series, contemporary stories became more prevalent as the grade level increased. In the MacMillan R Series contemporary stories were in equal amounts except at the first grade level were there was a larger amount of fairy tales.

READING ACTS TABLE II

PUBLISHER	LEVELS	ACTS OF READING
MacMillan	1-4	5
Scott-		
Foresman	1-4	6
Harcourt-		
Brace	1-4	3

Table II shows that the number of acts of reading displayed in the basal series were in small quantities. The total acts of reading represents less than ten percent. The acts of reading that were displayed showed people or animals reading signs almost exclusively. One story in the MacMillian 2-1 level displayed a father reading a news-

paper. The Scott-Foresman series contained the most acts of reading while Harcourt-Brace contained the least. But as can be seen, the difference between the MacMillan R and the Harcourt-Brace was one and only two below Scott-Foresman.

INVENTORY RESPONSE

Nineteen second grade students at Sussex Avenue School were given a teacher constructed questionaire. Out of the nineteen students, only twelve students responded. The results of the inventory were very interesting in that all of the students who responded said that they liked the books that they were reading in, and that most of the students were reading in Magic Times or Mirrors and Images. These are the 2-1 and 2-2 respectfully.

It should be noted that after the teacher explained the directions for completing the inventory, there were several students who did not follow directions. There were seven students who chose not to answer the inventory.

The students choices for the type of stories that they would like to see more of in their books were as following; murder stories, mystery stories, and a few had indicated that they would like to see more fairy tales in their books. There also appeared to be a wide variety in the types of stories that they liked. They were as following; The Little Brown Bear, Carmen, The Ugly Duckling, and The Impossible Possum. Finally, all of the students who answered indicated that they enjoyed the books that they are now reading in.

CONCLUSIONS

In analyzing the following data, the following conclusions can be made; First, the most prevalent type of literature found in the basal readers examined are contemporary stories. In each of the basal readers examined as the grade levels went up, the number of contemporary stories increased. Secondly, acts of reading appearing in the stories constitute less than ten percent of the stories. While the students appeared to enjoy reading in the books that they are now reading in, there appears to be a mismatch between the type of stories found in the basal readers and the type of stories the students preferred.

CONTENT OF BASAL READER: RELATED RESEARCH

CONTENT OF BASAL READER: RELATED RESEARCH

To promote good reading habits, the child must be motivated. If the child does not see reading as an integral part of life, the child will not want to read. The basal reader are a part of the process of developing good reading habits. Jackie Green-Wilder and Albert Kingston (1986) conducted a study involving five basal series: McMillian, Jovanovich,Harcourt-Brace, Ginn, and Scott-Foresman. The purpose of the study was to determine if reading in the basal stories were being portrayed as an important part of life. The books were examined for a character in the story shown in the act of reading. The results found that less than 10% of the stories in the basals showed characters in the act of reading. When an act of reading was shown, it would be shown on a signpost or someone has a book, but not reading it. Previous research in psychology has proven that children learn much of their behavior through modeling. If this is so, what are we encouraging children to do with reading? Why are some children not motivated to read?

Cynthia Hynd and Sylvia Carter (1983) did a content analysis of two different basals for disabled readers. They found no real differences in the types of literature in the basals that were used. However, it was discovered that the authors of both reading series suggested that the motivation to read needs to be stressed. This suggests that the authors of basals need to be aware of children's interests and that they should create some stories to promote the act

of reading as an integral part of life.

Kenneth Goodman (1986) argues that "Ironically the current basal series require more time for reading instruction while they provide less time for students actually reading." (pg. 359) This statement appears to support Clary and Jeter Smith's contention that we as educators need to carefully examine the basals for content and the purpose for using basal readers. Again the same question comes up. Are we motivating our children to read? Goodman goes even farther by suggesting that children be allowed to read stories from the basals at their own pace rather than read each and every story and do every skill. However, Goodman neglects to tell us that children need to have some sort of role model to motivate them to read.

L. D. Briggs (1985) supports this theory by saying, "It is common for children to be lacking in motivation when the material is dull and uninteresting...." (pg. 3) This suggests a motivational problem within the basal readers themselves. If the child is bored with the reading material, he or she will not want to read.

Beverly Dryden (1985) tried to develop a diagnostic reading assessment for grades two through five. The assessment instrument had thirty-six items and represented reading within the school as well as recreational reading. The conclusion was that a diagnostic reading assessment can give a teacher some insights as to what a child's reading interests are.

One might ask what a reading assessment has to do with the type

of literature found in the basals. The answer is that if a reading assessment was to be done on a basal, we might find if the material in the basal are in fact motivating the child to read.

Judith Reif (1985) did a study involving third grade reading attitudes. The study included three classes of third grade boys and girls. They were administered the Metropolitan Achievement Tests and The Learning Style Inventory. The results were that children in general displayed a favorable attitude towards reading.

Reif goes on to state, "A teacher who knows his/her own learning style as well as the students' reading style will have a systematic and effective procedure for planning instruction." (pg. 29) This appears to suggests that teachers themselves need to be motivated and have an interest in reading if they want their students to read.

Marguerite Thein (1985) supports Reif by saying, "Motivation is the process of involving an arousing, directing, and sustaining behavior. (pg. 104) This statement suggests that students must be motivated to read and it be done by developing reading material that are relevant to their lives.

Marlow Ediger (1985) offered some issues in designing a reading program. She states that teachers and administrators must decide how the reading program is to be set up. They need to know where the emphasis in reading should be placed. Where should the goals be placed? She cites word recognition techniques and comprehension of content as the two major goals. She also includes the attitudes of

the students. Students need to read for enjoyment and not just to attain certain skill levels.

Russavage, Lorton, and Millham (1985) discuss some of the activities teachers do with the basals. Durkin did a study involving the teacher's use of the basals. She was looking for reasons why teachers did what they did. She found that most of the teachers were using the questions from the teachers manual and that none of the teachers were developing a background for the story. This once again suggests a motivational problem with students and reading.

Russavage, Lorton, and Millham goes on to discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of basal readers. Some weaknesses are:

1. The story content is irrelevant to the lives of the children.
2. Word recognition skills are not fully developed. Too little time for children to develop the vocabulary.
3. There is a lack of stories on current topics. Some strengths of the basal readers are:
    1. The skills are in logical sequence.
    2. The stories are easy to identify.
    3. The vocabulary is controlled.

In addition to offering the strengths and weaknesses of the basal series they offer some solutions or modifications to be made.

1. Decide which skills need to be taught and teach those skills.
2. Devise better or more innovative ways to present material.
3. Follow students ideas in the flow of reading a story.

One better method of working with the basals is to use supplemental materials, such as newspapers, to teach skills to be taught in a specific lesson. Another way is to incorporate reading into other areas of the curriculum, such as social studies, science etc.

Marguerite Thein (1986) supports these ideas by stating the following:

> Classrooms with attractive attention-getting bulletin boards and reading corners with a multitude of mature interest value will stimulate student interest. Purposeful assigned readings will contribute directly to the attainment of relevant competencies of skills will serve to appeal to youngsters. (pg. 105)

Thirdly, the evidence also suggests a motivational problem beyond the basal readers itself. Are we as educators encouraging children to' be non-readers by spending more time on teaching reading skills than on actual reading? L. D. Briggs states, "Reading like any other skill is of value if the child can put the skill to practical use..." (pg.5) In addition, Briggs also says that the teacher must be motivated herself to read and demonstrate this to children with her own reading habits. This is especially in the lower grades where reading habits are being formed. Goodman supports this by saying that basals must be put in their palace and not use the basals as a complete reading guide for teaching reading skills. (pg. 362)

Fourthly, educators need to take a look at the reading curriculum and the basal series that is being used. If the literature is found to be dull and boring, then a change may be needed. Clary and Smith (1986) suggests that parents as well as teachers and administrators

get involved in the process in selecting a basal series. That means that specific goals and objectives must be set and a criteria for selecting a basal series must also be set.

This suggests that teachers must begin to really motivate students by providing them with material outside of the basals. This supports Goodman and Cleary theories that teachers are spending too much time in the basals teaching skills instead of reading.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the evidence that has been presented, the following conclusions can be made. First, the type of literature found in the basal readers can influence the reading habits of the child. If the child has not seen reading as an integral part of life, that child will very likely have an attitude of non-reading. Reading should and must be an integral part of life. Children will often take up habits and model the behaviors that are set before them. The basal readers set the tone for later reading habits and if we want our children to read, then we need to have some stories that include not just reading signs, but, reading in general.

Secondly, if the stories in the basal readers are dull and boring then children will of course be turned off to reading. This suggests that as educators we might want to take a look at the type of literature in the basals and find out if the literature then is motivating the child. We also need to find out if the stories are of interest and relevant to the child's life.

APPENDIX

INVENTORY RESPONSE

The student choices for the type of story they would like to see more of in their basal readers.

TYPE OF STORY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Murder	6
Mystery	5
Fairy Tales	1

The students favorite choices for stories already in their basal reader.

NAME OF STORY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
The Little Brown Bear	1
Carmen	6
The Ugly Duckling	3
The Impossible Possum	2

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